Towards a framework for studying Web-mediated rhetorical citizenship

From mapping concepts to asking questions

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1. Introduction

In the rhetorical tradition, it is a common conception that there is a close relationship between rhetoric and citizenship. According to the respected historian of rhetorical theory Thomas M. Conley, this relationship has been enunciated and emphasized by rhetorical thinkers since the emergence of rhetoric as a discipline in ancient Greece. In his acclaimed book *Rhetoric in the European tradition*, Conley identifies four basic views of rhetoric that, according to him, recur throughout the 2500-year-long history of rhetorical theory. One of these, which he terms "controversial" due to its proponents' focus on the societal function of rhetoric in relation to public political controversy, he traces back to the Greek philosophers Protagoras (c. 490-c. 400 BC) and Isocrates (436-338 BC) (1994, p. 23). According to Conley, one of the most important characteristics of Protagoras' thinking on rhetoric was the central role he ascribed to public debate (p. 5). Because he did not believe that political disagreements could be resolved by resorting to any absolutes such as objective criteria of truth or traditional standards of behavior, Protagoras meant that rhetoric served an important role in exactly such disputes, namely, that of examining arguments on both sides of a question at hand and, in turn, qualifying decisions about what to think and how to act in a particular situation (ibid.). Later, Conley argues, Isocrates continued and refined this line of thinking. He too was skeptical that political disputes could be resolved through philosophical deduction (pp. 17-18); instead he thought that political action should be guided by eloquence manifested in public debate (p. 21). As a result, he established a program of education which had a clear focus on rhetoric and aimed at teaching young citizens his notion of philosophy, namely, "a wisdom in civic affairs emphasizing moral responsibility and equated with mastery of rhetorical technique" (p. 17). For Isocrates speaking and thinking well and, in turn, acting wisely, i.e. rhetoric, ethics, and politics, were closely related (p. 18); hence, in his view the rhetorical education he gave his students also developed their sense of morality and prepared them to participate in public affairs. All in all, the ideas of Isocrates and before him Protagoras inspired the later and highly influential conception in the rhetorical tradition that the ideal citizen was a "good man skilled in speaking" (p. 20), and, according to Conley, their ideas have since recurred repeatedly in the history of rhetorical theory and, more specifically, in the thinking of such rhetoricians and philosophers as Cicero, Quintilian, Burke, Toulmin, and Perelman (p. 36, 38, 282, 304).

But while the conception that rhetoric is closely connected to citizenship is not new, the concept *rhetorical citizenship* is. The term was first coined by Lisa Storm Villadsen and Christian Kock when they established the researchers' network "Rhetorical Citizenship: Perspectives on Deliberative Democracy" at the University of Copenhagen in 2008 (Villadsen, 2008, p. 37). The network was inspired by both inter-disciplinary research on deliberative democracy and rhetorical research on rhetorical agency, and one of its main practical purposes was to bring together researchers from various disciplines who were interested in such areas of research as rhetoric, public debate, agency, citizenship, and democracy (pp. 37-39). These sources of inspiration and this purpose, I would argue, indicate why Villadsen and Kock found it relevant to form the network and,

importantly, put forward the new concept rhetorical citizenship that on the face of it refers to a well-known conception in the rhetorical tradition: First, their initiative can be seen as an attempt to make scholars outside the rhetorical community aware of this long-standing conception and, in turn, attentive to how the rhetorical tradition and its theoretical insights might contribute to the recent research on deliberative democracy. For example, a rhetorical notion of democracy and, in turn, public deliberation, political participation, and citizenship differs in important ways from the Habermasian-inspired notion of deliberative democracy focusing on rational discourse and warranted assent (Hauser, 2004, pp. 8-9, 12); hence a rhetorical perspective may contribute constructively to the understanding of deliberation, democracy, and citizen engagement by supplementing and, in some cases, challenging the conceptual assumptions and normative standards of this, so far, very prominent conceptualization of deliberative democracy. Second, Villadsen and Kock's initiative can be seen as a reaction to the recent discussion within the rhetorical community about the concept rhetorical agency, i.e. the capacity of human subjects to act in rhetorical situations, and the critical – and at times rather disconcerting – revaluation of basic rhetorical assumptions that this discussion has spawned, e.g. about subjectivity and intentionality.[1] Potentially, the concept rhetorical citizenship and studies of its manifestations can bring this discussion forward by bringing attention to, on the one hand, instances where citizens' civically-oriented rhetorical action is constructively realized and/or facilitated and, on the other hand, examples of how such public subjectivity is unrealized, constrained, or denied. All in all, due to the origin and context of its emergence, currently rhetorical citizenship is probably better understood as a broad umbrella term meant to promote cross-disciplinary insights and intra-disciplinary discussion rather than a clearly defined or fully developed concept meant to enable precise and consistent rhetorical analyses.

In sum, even though it is a well-known rhetorical conception that rhetoric and citizenship is closely linked, due to recent cross-disciplinary cooperative efforts and intra-disciplinary theoretical discussions, rhetorical scholars have in the new millennium shown a renewed interest in citizenship as a discursive phenomenon (Asen, 2004) and, in turn, put forward the concept rhetorical citizenship (Kock and Villadsen, 2008; Villadsen, 2008). My PhD project originates in this renewed interest and recent conceptual development. In my project, I study how political debates among users on Danish online newspapers are initiated, conducted, and experienced by both institutional and non-institutional actors, i.e., on the one hand, editors, journalists, and politicians and, on the other hand, users of such Web sites. One of the main purposes of the project is to theorize the concept *Web-mediated rhetorical citizenship*. Thus, I aim to contribute to the recent efforts within the rhetorical community to (re)conceptualize the relationship between rhetoric and citizenship by adopting a medium-specific approach. Ultimately, I hope to update the traditional rhetorical conception of how rhetoric relates to citizenship by taking into consideration the omnipresence and importance of the Web today and, moreover, to develop a more fully articulated and well-defined account of the concept rhetorical citizenship by studying it in a medium-specific context. More specifically, I hypothesize, I will contribute with an account of modern day citizenship as it is embedded in users' everyday lives on the Web and enacted in their production and reception of Web-based rhetorical discourse on public political matters and, in

[1] For a summary of this discussion and its implications for rhetorical research see Hoff-Clausen, Isager, and Villadsen (2005).

addition, as it is both facilitated and constrained by well-established institutional and political actors such as mainstream media institutions and political representatives. In my thesis, I will undertake this conceptualizing effort in a series of conceptually oriented rhetorical critiques (Jasinski, 2001a, p.139; 2001b, p. 256) where I will alternate between, on the one hand, carefully reading a number of debates and supplementary interviews with editors and users and, on the other hand, reflecting on existing theories and concepts and, in turn, possible new conceptual syntheses.

As an initial step in this effort, in this paper I seek to establish a theoretical and conceptual foundation for my critiques and develop a tentative framework for analyzing Web-mediated rhetorical citizenship. In order to do so, I take the typical questions and analytical foci of previous research on closely related but slightly different research subjects as a constructive starting point. Consequently, first, I map how the conceptual neologism Web-mediated rhetorical citizenship relates to existing fields of study and concepts and, in turn, explicate what search terms have guided my search for relevant existing research literature. Second, I review a selection of the identified literature associated with three of such adjacent fields and concepts, namely, rhetorical citizenship, Web-mediated rhetoric, and Web-mediated citizenship. Here, I focus on the analytical categories and questions that can be drawn from this previous research. Building on these categories and questions, third and finally, I draw up an aggregated list of categories and questions that presumably are relevant when studying manifestations of Web-mediated rhetorical citizenship.

2. Mapping Web-mediated rhetorical citizenship

In order to gain a general view of how the new concept Web-mediated rhetorical citizenship relates to existing research, theories, and concepts, I have taken the three words that make up the term and their possible combinations as a starting point. This approach is illustrated in Figure 1. The three circles in Figure 1 correspond to the three words Web-mediated, rhetorical, and citizenship. In parentheses, I have noted the three more or less well-established fields of study that are associated with each of these words, namely, Web media studies, rhetorical studies, and citizenship studies.[2] Where these three areas of research overlap, Web-mediated rhetorical citizenship emerges as an interdisciplinary concept that draws from all three of them. In addition, Figure 1 illustrates how Web-mediated rhetorical citizenship is also related to three adjacent, more specific sub-fields of study and/or concepts, namely, rhetorical citizenship, Web-mediated rhetoric[3], and Web-mediated citizenship[4]. These emerge where the three main

[2] At this point, I choose not to go into a discussion of what the most appropriate names for these fields of study are. Instead, I will simply explicate that I draw the terms rhetorical studies and citizenship studies from Lunsford, Wilson, and Eberly (2009) and Isin and Turner (2002), respectively, and that I exploit the lack of consensus described in Silver (2004) about what to call the first field and choose the more specific term Web media studies over the broader term Internet studies in order to signal the medium-specific approach characteristic of my study.

[3] Here I use Web-mediated rhetoric as a broad term that is closely related to such other terms as online rhetoric (Hoff-Clausen, 2008; Warnick, 2007), web rhetoric (Hoff-Clausen, 2008), digital rhetoric (Gurak and Antonijevic, 2009; Lanham, 1992; Losh, 2009; Zappen, 2005), and electronic rhetoric (Welch, 1999). While it is probably possible to argue that these various terms and related areas of research differ from each other in intricate ways, in this context, I view them as closely related because they represent an overall shared interest in how rhetorical phenomena emerge in a medium-specific context, namely, in digital media and, especially, on the Web.

areas of research, i.e. Web media studies, rhetorical studies, and citizenship studies, overlap two and two.

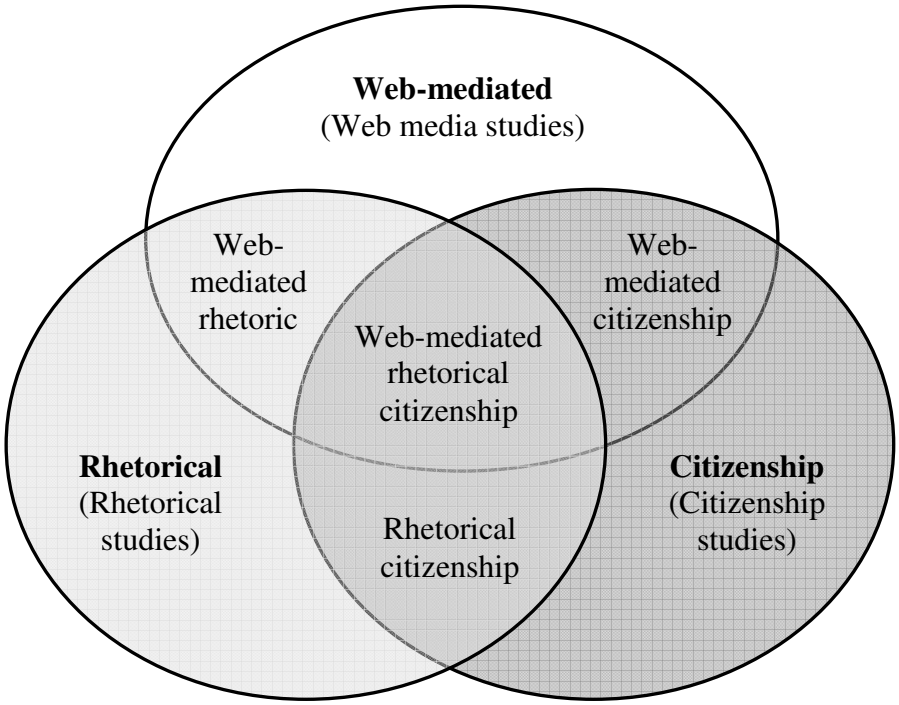

Figure 1: A map of the conceptual neologism Web-mediated rhetorical citizenship and, on the one hand, the three main fields of study that it draws from (i.e. Web media studies, rhetorical studies, and citizenship studies) and, on the other hand, the three sub-fields of study and/or concepts that it is also related to (i.e. rhetorical citizenship, Web-mediated rhetoric, and Web-mediated citizenship).

As I have already indicated, the different areas in Figure 1 correspond to different bodies of literature, the size of which varies greatly. Since it is a new concept, the literature on Web-mediated rhetorical citizenship is, of course, almost non-existent,[5] meanwhile the literature related to Web media studies, rhetorical studies, and citizenship studies is vast. In contrast, the literature on rhetorical citizenship, Web-mediated rhetoric, and Web-mediated citizenship is, on the one hand, better established

[4] With the term Web-mediated citizenship, I am implicitly referring to an area of research that is represented by such works as Coleman and Blumler (2009), Dahlgren (2009), and Mossberger, Tolbert, and McNeal (2007). In this literature, however, the more prevalent term seems to be digital citizenship; nonetheless, in this paper I mainly use the term Web-mediated citizenship since it is more consistent with the rest of my terminology.

[5] For two important exceptions see Bakardjieva (forthcoming) and Howard (2010). In her article, Bakardjieva argues for the relevance of the new concept *mundane citizenship* based on three case studies of how ordinary citizens' everyday civic and political participation, e.g. as it is expressed in discourse, is facilitated by new media. In his article, Howard writes about how the vernacular rhetoric of users in online participatory media relates to their practical enactment of discursive citizenship. While Bakardjieva, on the one hand, does not refer to the rhetorical tradition or draw on rhetorical concepts and Howard, on the other hand, does not use the term Web-mediated rhetorical citizenship or go that far into the concept of discursive citizenship, they both study phenomena that emerge at the intersection of the Web, discourse, and citizenship and, in turn, come close to addressing some of the conceptual issues that I am interested in.

than the literature on Web-mediated rhetorical citizenship and, on the other hand, more manageable than the literature associated with Web media studies, rhetorical studies, and citizenship studies. Consequently, instead of attempting to conceptualize Web-mediated rhetorical citizenship either from scratch or by synthesizing the enormous amounts of general literature on the Web, rhetoric, and citizenship, the more or less well-established but manageable bodies of literature on rhetorical citizenship, Web-mediated rhetoric, and Web-mediated citizenship might serve as a constructive alternative starting point for such a conceptualizing effort.

Therefore I have let the three terms rhetorical citizenship, Web-mediated rhetoric, and Web-mediated citizenship serve as my primary search terms when I have searched for existing research literature that I can use to begin conceptualizing Web-mediated rhetorical citizenship. In relation to this paper, I have used these search terms to do systematic searches in the databases rex.kb.dk and scholar.google.dk. As a supplement to these systematic searches, I have, of course, consulted literature I already knew of as well as literature from the list of assigned readings from the PhD course "Citizenship in the Digital Republic" and used the references in this literature and in the literature identified in the systematic searches to search for additional literature. From the results returned from these various searches, I have selected a manageable amount of literature for the review in this paper using a two-step procedure and the following criteria: First, I have delimited a body of literature that I find relevant for the review in my PhD thesis based on, on the one hand, the *centrality* of each text in relation to the respective search term and, on the other hand, the *variation* in the resulting corpus of texts in terms of origins and foci. Here, the aim has been to ensure both the focus and scope of my final review. Second, from this body of literature and for each of the three primary search terms, I have selected two or three texts for the review in this paper based on their *specificity* and *recency*, i.e. I have primarily chosen texts that contain rather general introductions to each of the search terms and are among the most recently published on the subject. In the next section, for each of the terms rhetorical citizenship, Web-mediated rhetoric, and Web-mediated citizenship, I sum up the more specific search strategy I have used, explicate the body of literature identified in the first step of the selection process and, finally, review the texts selected in the second step focusing on the analytical categories and questions that they make use of.

3. Reviewing existing research literature

3.1 Literature on rhetorical citizenship

In relation to my search for literature on rhetorical citizenship, I have used truncation to refine the primary search term and, as a result, searched for 'rhetoric* citizenship'. This search and the subsequent evaluation of its results in the first step of my selection process has resulted in a body of literature for the review in my PhD thesis which contains texts that deal specifically with rhetorical citizenship and, in addition, texts that deal more generally with the character and function(s) of rhetoric in (post)modern democratic societies (Asen, 2004; Hauser, 1999, 2004; Kock and Villadsen, 2008; Villadsen, 2008).[6] In this paper, I review two of these texts, namely, Villadsen (2008)

[6] As Peter Dahlgren has pointed out, definitions of citizenship are closely related to definitions of democracy (2009, p. 63); hence I have included the latter, more general texts by Hauser since I, to a great extent, adopt his understanding of democracy in my study and draw on his work on the rhetorical

and Asen (2004). As the review will show, these rhetorical scholars share the notion that citizenship is enacted through rhetorical action and, consequently, they are interested in how citizens' rhetorical engagement in relation to public matters is realized, facilitated, and constrained in various societal contexts.

In her article, Villadsen introduces the term rhetorical citizenship and, in turn, reflects on the potential benefits of viewing citizenship as a rhetorical-communicative phenomenon and, in addition, the typical research questions such a view of citizenship may foster. Rhetoric, she argues, and democracy, civic life, and public debate are inextricably bound up with each other (2008, p. 37). In democratic societies, rhetoric acts both instrumentally and constitutively: It is a resource for citizens who seek to persuade their fellow citizens in public debates, but, importantly, it is also the origin of the public subject positions that such debates presupposes.[7] As Villadsen puts it, "rhetoric is far more than just an instrument for gaining influence; it is a medium for being a citizen" (p. 38, my translation). Therefore, she argues, there are several reasons why it is constructive to conceptualize citizenship as rhetorical. First, doing so entails viewing the public process of verbally exchanging view points and ideas in relation to political disputes as being just as important as the decisions that may follow (p. 38). According to Villadsen, this is a radically different approach to public debate and decision-making than the one characteristic of focus group studies and opinion polls which, simply put, posits that people are set in their ways and views, i.e. resistant to arguments, and simply choose by estimating what is most beneficial for them (ibid.). Second, to base a conceptualization of public debate and, in turn, citizenship on rhetorical theory entails a commitment to the common good in a society (ibid.). In the rhetorical tradition it is a well-established notion that public political debate, understood as the reasoned weighing of conflicting view points on what to do in situations marked by contingency, should contribute to practical solutions to public problems for the benefit of the community (ibid.) – at least, I would add, in the "controversial" strand of rhetorical thinking mentioned in the introduction of this paper. In sum, in line with the classical rhetorical tradition, rhetorical scholars seek to contribute to the study of citizens' public engagement by insisting that citizenship is enacted by participating, in a very broad sense, in public political debates oriented towards the common good – which, importantly, does not mean that rhetoricians expect citizens to constantly participate in public life or to necessarily agree on what the "the common good" is.[8]

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character of publics, public spheres, and public opinion (1999) and, specifically, his notion of rhetorical democracy (2004).

[7] For a discussion of the constitutive character of rhetoric see Charland (1987).

[8] For example, Robert Asen, whose work on citizenship I also review in this paper, emphasizes that scholars of citizenship should not expect citizens to be constantly involved in public matters: "[C]itizenship is only one of many modes of public subjectivity (…) Multiplicity [in terms of modes of public subjectivity] makes citizenship possible by situating it as something one can take up, rather than as a condition that is always or never present. People do not – and should not – enact citizenship all the time. Full-time citizenship imposes a false simplicity on people's complicated lives and frames citizenship as a burden rather than a process of active, willful uptake." (2004, pp. 195-196) In addition, as Villadsen points out in her article, one of the foci of rhetorical scholars who have been interested in rhetorical citizenship has been why reasonable disagreement may persist among citizens on political issues and, in turn, how the rhetorical tradition may possibly contribute to the constructive handling of this sort of disagreement (2008, pp. 37-38). In this sense, the commitment to the common good that Villadsen writes about is probably best understood as a commitment to *debate* rather than to *agree* what "the common good" is.

Finally, in order to explore the constructive potential of this rhetorical conceptualization of citizenship, Villadsen explains, rhetorical scholars have posed various research questions (p. 37). Possibly because they, as mentioned earlier, have been inspired by inter-disciplinary research on deliberative democracy and rhetorical research on rhetorical agency, the questions mainly fall in one of two groups: On the one hand, they revolve around *the character, function(s), and norms of public debate*, e.g. where the debate takes place, why it typically involves reasonable disagreement, and how it ought to be conducted; on the other hand, the questions address *the capacity of citizens to act rhetorically in relation to public issues*, e.g. why some citizens are able to make their voices heard and some not, what the possibilities and barriers are for citizens to enact rhetorical citizenship, and what a constructive public speaker position is (pp. 37-39). As is characteristic for rhetorical scholarship in general, taken together, these questions are descriptive and interpretative as well as normative and prescriptive.

In his article, which is among the sources of inspiration for the research on rhetorical citizenship described by Villadsen, Asen advances a discourse theory of citizenship and proposes that scholars interested in the democratic participation of citizens perceive citizenship as *a mode of public engagement* (2004, p. 191). In his view, it is fruitful to think of citizenship as a discursive phenomenon, because discourse is what makes human interaction and hence the radical, Deweyan notion of democracy that he ascribes to possible (pp. 196-197). Moreover, he argues, while it is often regarded as such, discourse is not just prefatory to "real" political action; on the contrary, "[d]iscourse practices present potentially accessible and powerful everyday enactments of citizenship" (p. 207). In addition, by using the word mode and conceptualizing citizenship as a modality, Asen seeks to bring about a change in scholarly focus from what specific acts constitute citizenship to how citizens enact citizenship in an ongoing process of public engagement (pp. 190-191). This, he argues, will enable scholars to recognize citizenship as a performance that is differently available to different people, sometimes hybrid in its character, and always dependent on the context of its enactment (pp. 203-207). As possible starting points for engaging citizenship as a mode of public engagement, Asen proposes five analytical foci, namely, generativity, risk, commitment, creativity, and sociability (p. 198). As he explains, these foci are meant to generate such critical questions as (pp. 199- 203): How does citizens' public engagement proceed *generatively* to put new and different issues on the public agenda and make new and different voices heard in public? How does citizens' engagement exhibit *risk*, for example, in that it entails putting view points and beliefs out in public and perhaps having to revise or even abandon them? How, on the other hand, does citizens' public engagement affirm *commitment* to personal view points and beliefs but also to the public exchange and testing of such? In addition, how does the public engagement of citizens express *creativity*, for example, when playful and alternative strategies are adopted to draw attention to issues and make view points known? And, finally, how does citizens' public engagement foster *sociability* in that such engagement, among other things, entails trying to take the perspectives of others into account? Importantly, Asen resists stipulating the constitutive characteristics of citizenship and hence emphasizes that the five foci are not meant to refer to such characteristics; rather, the foci are intended to serve as vantage points that individually or collectively can guide a critic's query into citizenship as a discursive phenomenon (pp. 198-199).

3.2 Literature on Web-mediated rhetoric

In relation to my searches for existing research literature on Web-mediated rhetoric, I have refined the primary search term 'Web-mediated rhetoric' by using synonyms and truncation and, as a result, done searches for 'Web* rhetoric*', 'online rhetoric*', and 'digital* rhetoric*'. After having gone through the results of these searches in the first step of my selection process, I have identified a corpus of relevant literature for the review in my PhD thesis that contains both general accounts on Web-mediated rhetoric and more specialized studies of various rhetorical phenomena as they appear online, e.g. ethos, genre, and political rhetoric (Gurak, 1997, 2001; Gurak and Antonijevic, 2009; Hoff-Clausen, 2002, 2008; Howard, 2008a, 2008b, 2010; Lanham, 1992; Losh, 2009; Miller, 2001; Miller and Shepherd, 2004; Warnick, 2002, 2007; Welch, 1999; Zappen, 2005). From this body of literature, I have chosen three of the more general and most recent texts for the review in this paper, namely, Gurak and Antonijevic (2009), Warnick (2007), and Hoff-Clausen (2008). Overall, the following review will show that these researchers share an interest in the specific ways that rhetorical discourse is facilitated and constrained by the Web medium and, in turn, the kind of new, digital literacy that both rhetorical critics and ordinary Web users need to develop.

In their encyclopaedic article, Gurak and Antonijevic reflect on what the unique affordances of the Web medium are in relation to rhetoric and, in turn, identify four key features of Web-mediated discourse, namely, speed, reach, anonymity, and interactivity (pp. 499-500). (These features are also presented in Gurak (2001).) With the term *speed* Gurak and Antonijevic refer to the possibility of instant publication and distribution of information on the Web; this, they argue, has several consequences, for example, that Web-mediated discourse has a certain partially oral, casual, repetitive, and redundant quality. The term *reach* refers to the wide availability of information once it is published on the Web. As Gurak and Antonijevic point out, Web-mediated discourse can, potentially, be accessed by Web users from all over the world, i.e. many people in many places, and due to the non-hierarchical and open nature of the Internet this quantitative and spatial reach is, in principle, available to anyone. *Anonymity* refers to the feature that on the Web users can (try to) hide their identity and/or create multiple identities and, as a result, they can have a sense that they communicate anonymously. According to Gurak and Antonijevic, on the on hand, this is probably why communicative norms seem to be more contingent on the Web and, in turn, why users sometimes engage in the practice of "flaming", i.e. an aggressive, often ad hominem-based style of communication; on the other hand, anonymity also makes it possible for users to mask their socio-economic status and, in principle, engage in more symmetrical communication. Finally, the term *interactivity*, seemingly, refer to the active role users play and the adaptable character texts have on the Web. Gurak and Antonijevic describe interactivity, rather broadly and somewhat vaguely, as "an active two-way exchange" and argue that a key feature of Web-mediated discourse is that users can and often must interact with – and sometimes transform – the information they access on the Web.

In an account that in many ways is similar to Gurak and Anotonijevic's, Warnick discusses how rhetoric is affected by Web-mediation and, more specifically, what the unique characteristics of Web-mediated rhetoric are in relation to five elements of the communication process, namely, reception, source, form, time, and space (2007, p. 27). In relation to the element *reception*, Warnick posits that because of the multilinear

character of most Web texts and the participatory nature of many Web sites, users often function as co-producers of meaning and content (pp. 28-30). As a consequence, she argues, scholars interested in Web-mediated rhetoric must study both what users' potential and actual roles and experiences are on the Web and, importantly, how their rhetorical (inter)activity and participation is facilitated and constrained (pp. 31-33). As for the element *source*, Warnick claims that when users assess the credibility of a message in online environments, they ascribe less importance to its source than in offline settings (p. 34). In her explanation of this development, she, among other things, points to the prevalence of collectively authored, automatically assembled, individually customized, user-generated, and/or anonymous content on the Web which, according to her, causes many messages in this medium to appear authorless (pp. 34-36). In relation to *form*, Warnick, inspired by Lev Manovich, emphasizes the modularity of texts on the Web, i.e. the fact that they are made up of different digital modules such as code, text, images, media files, and so on (p. 36). This, she holds, explains the versatile but also fragmented character of Web-mediated discourse; on the one hand, modules may easily be recycled in new and different settings and, on the other hand, no momentary constellation of modules, i.e. text, is safe from dispersion (p. 37). The element *time*, Warnick argues, is affected in at least three ways: In contrast to traditional mass audiences, users can decide for themselves when to access Web content; in addition, each of them will potentially access it under different circumstances, for example, in terms of how fast their connections and computers are; and, finally, the content they access is often mutable and ephemeral (pp. 37-39). In sum, Web-mediation affects rhetoric in terms of the moment, the speed, and the duration of a given communication process and product. Finally, in relation to the element *space*, Warnick, again inspired by Manovich, describes the Web user as a "spatial wanderer" and, in turn, the Web audience as ephemeral, on the move, and fragmented (pp. 40-41). As she also points out in relation to the element time, users do not constitute a traditional (mass) audience since the timing and character of the content they are exposed to varies; moreover, because the navigable character of the Web makes them prone to "surf on" and look for new information elsewhere, users' attention and interest is often passing (ibid.).

In line with the two previous texts, Hoff-Clausen also reflects on the consequences of Web-mediation in relation to rhetoric and rhetorical criticism. She recommends that rhetorical critics who study Web-mediated rhetoric perceive Web sites as so-called *rhetorical media for interaction* (2008, p. 230). In this term, she explains, the word medium is supposed to signal a focus on processes and actions instead of products and actors (p. 230). According to her, a Web site is better understood as a medium for the ongoing rhetorical actions of its possibly unknown and/or anonymous initiator(s) and users than a finished work or text created by one or few identifiable authors (ibid.). Moreover, in her use of the word medium, Hoff-Clausen is inspired by Canadian medium theory and hence adopts the view that any medium is biased in the sense that it promotes certain actions and impedes others (pp. 230-231). Consequently, she argues that rhetorical critics must think of Web sites as media and, more specifically, *channels*, *grammars*, and *environments* that both facilitate and constrain the rhetorical actions of their users (pp. 231-232). In relation to the word rhetorical, Hoff-Clausen points out that while Web sites are supported by technology, they are also created with the use of symbols and, importantly, for specific purposes and situations; hence, she argues, they are not just media but rhetorical media (p. 233). Finally, in relation to the word

interaction, she explains that this is meant to emphasize that while most users' experiences on the Web are characterized by reception, they are typically also characterized by response and transactions, i.e. posting comments, doing searches, and placing orders (p. 233). All in all, Hoff-Clausen argues that perceiving Web sites as rhetorical media that frame user interaction is a first, important step for critics and users alike in terms of developing a new *digital literacy* adequate for understanding Web-mediated rhetoric (p. 230). (In their previous writings, both Gurak and Warnick have also addressed the subject of literacy in relation to Web-mediated rhetoric (Gurak, 2001; Warnick, 2002).)

3.3 Literature on Web-mediated citizenship

In relation to my searches for research literature on Web-mediated citizenship, I have also used synonyms and truncation to refine the primary search term 'Web-mediated citizenship' and, consequently, completed searches for 'Web* citizenship', 'online citizenship', and 'digital* citizenship'. Again, in the first step of my selection process, I have evaluated the search results and arrived at a corpus of literature for the review in my PhD thesis that generally originate in the social sciences and cover both large quantitative studies of the causal effects of the Internet on citizenship and smaller qualitative studies of the potential of new media in relation to the civic and political participation of citizens (Bakardjieva, forthcoming; Coleman and Blumler, 2009; Dahlgren, 2009; Hindman, 2009; Janack, 2006; Jensen, 2003; Mossberger, Tolbert, and McNeal, 2007). For the review in this paper, I have selected two texts from this body of literature, namely, Bakardjieva (forthcoming) and Mossberger, Tolbert, and McNeal (2007). Even though the two texts are quite different from each other, overall, they reflect an interest in the potential ways that citizenship, sometimes in new forms, is facilitated by the Web medium and, importantly, the potential societal and human consequences of citizens' (lack of access to) enactment of such Web-mediated citizenship.

In her forthcoming article, Bakardjieva introduces the concept *mundane citizenship* to describe the relationship between citizens' use of new media and their civic and political engagement as it emerges in three case studies she has carried out in a Bulgarian context. Mundane citizenship, she argues, is defined by the origin or context as well as the means of its enactment: "[T]he two defining characteristics of mundane citizenship are first, that it is intertwined with the routine activities and concerns of everyday living and second, that it is crucially enabled by new media of communication." (forthcoming, p. 3) Based on her case studies, Bakardjieva concludes that new media – which she largely seems to equate with Web-based means of communication – can potentially play several constructive roles in relation to citizens' everyday enactment of citizenship: First, the Web enables citizens to access, evaluate, and sometimes affirm or challenge public political discourse and the subject positions constituted in it where and when it suits them; second, the Web makes it possible for citizens to meet other citizens online who can be similar to but, importantly, also different from them in terms of background, life situation, and political convictions; third, on the Web citizens can engage in what Jane Mansbridge has termed "everyday political talk" and, in turn, become aware of the existence, depth, and nuances of political conflicts but also of possible alliances with other like-minded citizens; fourth, through the Web citizens can gain access to and sometimes influence and challenge

powerful institutional actors such as the traditional mass media, politicians, and corporate representatives; fifth and finally, sometimes online civic interaction can support offline civic action which, in turn, can create real social change (p. 28). In order to further explain the character and emergence of mundane citizenship and, in addition, the way this conception of citizenship relates to other conceptions, Bakardjieva, in part inspired by Ulrich Beck, distinguishes between three levels of political action, namely, the levels of politics proper, subpolitics, and subactivism (pp. 6-7). On the level of *politics proper* political action is carried out by professional political actors within official, recognized political institutions. On the level of *subpolitics* political action is carried out by professional and/or formally organized actors, e.g. NGOs or social movements, outside political institutions. Finally, on the level of *subactivism* individual, private, and largely unorganized actors engage in actions that, on the one hand, are related to politics or ethics but, on the other hand, often do not transcend the private sphere or have any immediate public impact. Acts of mundane citizenship, Bakardjieva explains, always originate and often stay at the level of subactivism; but, she argues, an important question then for scholars of citizenship is "what factors and conditions need to be in place for subactivism to break out of the confines of the private sphere and to percolate into the more visible and institutionalized spheres of activity characterizing subpolitics and formal politics." (p. 7) Based on her own case studies, Bakardjieva concludes that citizens' creative use of the Web and Web-based communication practices can in fact affect such a leap; but, importantly, it typically requires that such online activity is supplemented by *offline activity*, e.g. public demonstrations, *support from subpolitical actors*, e.g. NGOs, and, at some point, *press coverage* in the traditional mass media (p. 7, 18-21). If these factors and conditions are in place, Bakardjieva posits, then citizens' enactment of mundane citizenship can indeed transcend the level of subactivism and affect positive social change in modern democratic societies (pp. 20-21, 28).

In their book, Mossberger, Tolbert, and McNeal present the results of a large multivariate statistical study of *digital citizenship*. Digital citizenship, they stipulate in the introduction, is "the ability to participate in society online" (2008, p. 1); more specifically, they define digital citizens as "those who use the Internet regularly and effectively (...) for political information to fulfill their civic duty (...) [and] at work for economic gain" (pp. 1-2). According to them, daily Internet use is indicative of citizens' ability to participate in society online and, hence, digital citizenship, because it implies not only access but also skills, e.g. literacy, information literacy, and technical competence (p. 1). Taking this definition of digital citizenship as a starting point, Mossberger, Tolbert, and McNeal study, on the one hand, *the benefits of inclusion in society online*, i.e. what the impact of the Internet is on the economic opportunity, civic engagement, and political participation of citizens (pp. 17-18). On the other hand, they study *the patterns of exclusion from society online*, i.e. how such factors as socio-economic status, level of education, race, age, and type of Internet connection affect citizens' societal participation online and, in turn, what the costs and causes of exclusion from digital citizenship are (pp. 17-19). Their overall conclusion is that citizens' ability to use the Internet is so important for economic opportunity and political participation that due to a concern for *equality* it ought to be ensured for all (U.S.) citizens through government policy (p. 2, 4, 19). Moreover, they argue, this is the case regardless of which of three prominent (U.S.) traditions regarding citizenship one

ascribes to, i.e. the liberal (equality of opportunity), the republican (civic participation and duty), or the ascriptive hierarchical (inequality due to e.g. race, gender, or ethnicity) (p. 2, 4-9). As their study shows, citizens' Internet use correlates with both equality of (economic) opportunity and civic participation on the one hand (pp. 5-7) and with offline inequalities based on ascriptive characteristics on the other (pp. 8-9). As a result, Mossberger, Tolbert, and McNeal conclude: "Together, these multiple traditions [of how to understand citizenship] offer a framework for understanding digital citizenship as an integral part of inclusion in the larger society, rather than simply providing entertainment, convenience, or even economic efficiency" (p. 9).

4. Conclusion: Asking new questions by combining old ones

In this paper, I have argued that a constructive starting point for conceptualizing Web-mediated rhetorical citizenship and, more specifically, formulating an analytical framework for studying this phenomenon is the existing research on rhetorical citizenship, Web-mediated rhetoric, and Web-mediated citizenship. In order to substantiate this claim and explore the strengths and weaknesses of such an approach, I have described my systematic searches for literature on these three research subjects and the relevant results these searches have returned. In turn, I have reviewed a small selection of the identified texts focusing on the main concepts, important analytical categories, and typical research questions in them. In this final part of my paper, I will briefly sum up the questions, foci, and terms that emerge as relevant for studying Web-mediated rhetorical citizenship based on the questions previously posed in relation to rhetorical citizenship, Web-mediated rhetoric, and Web-mediated citizenship. The intent is not to offer a full-fledged conceptualization of Web-mediated rhetorical citizenship or an exhaustive list of questions that every study of this phenomenon must address; rather, the questions are meant to serve, on the one hand, as a source of inspiration from which relevant, more specific analytical questions can spring and, on the other hand, as a frame of reference within which specific studies of Web-mediated rhetorical citizenship may be contextualized in terms of how they relate to existing research.

Inspired by the previous research on rhetorical citizenship, an obvious, but important general question to ask when studying Web-mediated rhetorical citizenship is *how users enact citizenship through civically-oriented rhetorical action in Web-mediated fora*. More specifically, studies of Web-mediated rhetorical citizenship could, for example, take one or a selection of the following questions as their starting point: What is debated on the Web, where, (initiated) by who, with what purpose(s), and influenced by what explicit or implicit norms of conduct (the focus *public debate*)? What constructive speaker positions are citizens offered or able to create online, and why are some citizens perhaps denied or unable to establish such positions (the focus *agency*)? And how does citizens' civically-oriented rhetorical action on the Web potentially ensure that new issues are addressed and new voices heard, and how does it possibly reflect taking the perspective of others (the foci *generativity* and *sociability*)?

In addition, inspired by the previous research on Web-mediated rhetoric, another important general question to ask in studies of Web-mediated rhetorical citizenship is *how users' enactment of rhetorical citizenship is facilitated and constrained by the Web-mediated environment itself*. More specifically, one or more of the following examples of questions could be relevant to consider: How do the unique characteristics

of the Web medium support and limit users' online rhetorical action in relation to public political matters (e.g. the features *speed* and *anonymity*)? How does the ephemeral character of Web content on the one hand and the fragmented, in flux character of Web audiences on the other affect the politically-oriented rhetorical engagements of users online (the foci *time* and *space*)? How are certain rhetorical actions promoted and others impeded by the technical and symbolic framing of political debates among users on the Web (the term *rhetorical media for interaction*)? And what competencies in terms of understanding and mastering Web-mediated rhetoric do users need to have in order to participate in political deliberations online (the focus *digital literacy*)?

Finally, inspired by the existing research on Web-mediated citizenship, an important general question to ask in relation to Web-mediated rhetorical citizenship is *how users' (lack of access to) enactment of rhetorical citizenship on the Web has societal and human consequences*. In this relation, examples of more specific questions that could be relevant to ask are: If any, what then are the human and societal consequences of citizens' enactment of Web-mediated rhetorical citizenship on different, more or less well-established and institutionalized levels of political action (the terms *politics proper*, *subpolitics*, and *subactivism*)? What situational factors and conditions affect the impact of citizens' Web-mediated rhetorical-political action in terms of actual societal change (e.g. the factors *offline activity*, *support from subpolitical actors*, and/or *press coverage* in other media)? And what are the possible causes (and costs) of citizens' (lack of access to) enactment of rhetorical citizenship on the Web (the foci *inclusion*, *exclusion*, and *equality*)?

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